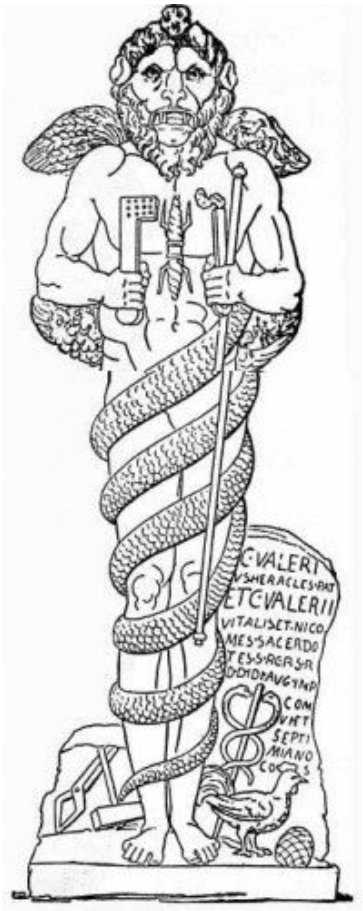
Yaldabaoth

Yaldabaoth, otherwise known as **Jaldabaoth** or **Ialdabaoth**[a] (/ˌjɑːldəˈbeɪɒθ/; Koinē Greek: Ιαλδαβαώθ, romanized: *Ialdabaóth*; Latin: *Ialdabaoth*;[1] Coptic: ⲓⲁⲗⲧⲁⲃⲁⲱⲑ *Ialtabaôth*), is a malevolent God and demiurge (creator of the material world) in various Gnostic sects and movements, sometimes represented as a theriomorphic, lion-headed serpent.[2][3][4] He is identified as the false god who keeps the souls trapped in physical bodies, imprisoned in the material universe.[2][3][4]

Etymology



Drawing of the lion-headed figure found at the Mithraeum of C. Valerius Heracles and sons, dedicated 190 CE at Ostia Antica, Italy (CIMRM 312).

The etymology of the name *Yaldabaoth* has been subject to many speculative theories. Until 1974, etymologies deriving from the unattested Aramaic: בהותא, romanized: *bāhūṯā*, supposedly meaning "chaos", represented the majority view. Following an analysis by the Jewish historian of religion

Gershom Scholem published in 1974,[5] this etymology no longer enjoyed any notable support. His analysis showed the unattested Aramaic term to have been fabulated and attested only in a single corrupted text from 1859, with its claimed translation having been transposed from the reading of an earlier etymology, whose explanation seemingly equated "darkness" and "chaos" when translating an unattested supposed plural form of Hebrew: בוהו, romanized: *bōhu*.[5][6]

The first etymology was advanced in 1575 by Feuardentius, supposedly translating it from Hebrew to mean Latin: *a patribus genitus*, lit. 'the child of fathers'.[7][8] A theory proposed by Matter in 1828 claimed to have identified the name as descending from Hebrew: ילדא, romanized: *yāldā*, lit. 'child' and from Hebrew: בהות, romanized: *bahot*, a supposed plural form of Hebrew: בוהו, romanized: *bōhu*, lit. 'emptiness, darkness'. Matter however interpreted it to mean 'chaos', thus translating *Yaldaboath* as "child of darkness [...] an element of chaos".[9][10]

This etymology was popular due to its perceived literary merits.[b] It inspired Hilgenfeld to keep Matter's proposed 'chaos' translation, while fabulating a more plausible sounding, but unattested second noun: Aramaic: בהותא, romanized: *bāhūthā*. Claiming the name to derive from Aramaic: ילדא בהותא, romanized: *yaldā bāhūthā* supposedly meaning 'child of chaos' in 1884. This became the late 19th, early 20th century majority view, which was supported by Schenke,[c] Böhlig, and Labib. The latter two also cited a supposed attestation for Aramaic: בהותא, romanized: *bāhūthā*, lit. 'chaos'.[d][12] This supposed attestation stemmed from a Targum and was merely a corrupted reading of Aramaic: כהותא, romanized: *kāhūthā*, lit. 'strife' published in a 1859 Bible. This pseudo-variant was translated in Jastrow's popular Aramaic dictionary as 'confusion'.[13]

Helped by these events, Hilgenfeld's etymology remained the majority view until a 1974 analysis by Scholem explained its origin. Consequently most scholars retracted their support.[e] Additionally, Scholem argued that based on the earliest textual data, which termed Yaldabaoth "the King of Chaos", he was claimed to be the progenitor of chaos, not its progeny.[15]

Scholem's own theory rendered the name as *Yald' Abaoth*. *Yald'* being Aramaic: ילדא, romanized: *yaldā*[f] but translated as 'begetter', not 'child' and *Abaoth* being a term attested in magic texts, descending from Hebrew: צבאות, romanized: *Tzevaot*, lit. 'Sabaoth, armies'.[g] Thus he rendered *Yald' Abaoth* as 'begetter of Sabaoth'.[15] Black objects to this, because Sabaoth is the name of one of Yaldaboth's sons in some Gnostic texts. Instead he suggests the second noun to be Jewish Aramaic: בהתייה, romanized: *behūṯā*, lit. 'shame'. Which is cognate with Hebrew: בושה, romanized: *bōšeṯ*, a term used to replace the name Ba'al in the Hebrew Bible. Thus Blacks' proposal renders Aramaic: ילדא בהתייה, romanized: *yaldā behūṯā*, lit. 'son of shame/Ba'al'.[12]

In his proposed 1967 etymology Adam, already diverted from the then majority view and translated Aramaic: ילדא, romanized: *yaldā* similarly to Scholem, as German: *Erzeugung*, lit. 'bringing forth'. He

believed the name's second part to derive from Syriac: ܐܒܗܘܬܐ, romanized: *ʾabbāhūṯā*, lit. 'fatherhood'. This he interpreted however to describe more broadly 'the power of generation'; thus suggesting the name to mean 'the bringing forth of the power of generation'.[16][12]

Historical origins

The donkey-headed Seth depicted in the Greek Magical Papyri

Alexamenos graffito depicting a crucified Jesus as a donkey-headed god

Following the Assyrian conquest of Egypt in the 7th century BCE, Seth was seen as an evil deity by the Egyptians and not commonly worshipped, in large part due to his role as the god of foreigners.[17] From at least 200 BCE onward, a tradition developed in the Graeco-Egyptian Ptolemaic Kingdom which identified Yahweh, the god of the Jews, with the Egyptian god Seth.[18] Diverging from previous zoologically multiplicitous depictions, Seth's appearance during the Hellenistic period onwards was depicted as resembling a man with a donkey's head.[19][20] The Greek practice of interpretatio graeca, ascribing the gods of another people's pantheon to corresponding ones in one's own, had been adopted by the Egyptians after their Hellenisation; during the process of which they had identified Seth with Typhon, a snake-monster, which roars like a lion.[21]

The story of the Exodus, featured in the Hebrew Bible, speaks of the Jews as a nation betrayed and subjugated by the Pharaoh, for whom Yahweh subjects Egyptians to ten plagues — destroying their country, defiling the Nile, and killing all their first-born sons. Jewish migration within the Hellenised Ptolemaic Kingdom to Greek-speaking Egyptian cities such as Alexandria led to the creation of the Septuagint, a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Koine Greek.[22] Furthermore, the story of the Exodus was adapted by Ezekiel the Tragedian into the Ancient Greek: ἐξαγωγή, romanized: *Exagōgḗ*, a Greek play performed in Alexandria and seen by Egyptians and Jews. Egyptian receptions of the Exodus story were widely negative, because it insulted their gods and praised their suffering. Thus it

inspired Egyptian works retelling the story, but changing its details to mock the Jews and exalt Egypt and its gods.[23]

In this context some Egyptians saw similarities between Yahweh's in-narrative actions and attributes and those of Seth, in addition to a phonetic resemblance between Koinē Greek: Ἰαω, romanized: *Iaō*, Yahweh's name as used by hellenised Jews, and Coptic: ⲓⲱ, romanized: *Iō*, lit. 'donkey', then seen as the animal of Seth.[24] From this arose a popular response to the Jewish accusation that Egyptians were merely worshipping beasts, namely that, in truth, the Jews themselves worshipped a beast, a donkey or a donkey-headed man, ie Seth.[25]

Accusations of onolatry against the Jews, spread from the Egyptian milieu, with its understanding of the donkey's Seth-related importance, to the rest of the Graeco-Roman world, which was largely ignorant of this context. In the most famous variation of narratives alleging Jewish onolatry Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king famous for raiding the Jerusalem Temple, supposedly discovered, that its Holiest of Holies was not empty, but instead contained a donkey idol.[26][h] After the emergence of Christianity the same charge was also repeated against its followers. Most famously so in the earliest known depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Alexamenos graffito, where a Christian by the name of Alexamenos is shown worshipping a donkey-headed crucified god.[28][29]

According to Litwa, this tradition forms the basis for the development of Gnostic beliefs about Yaldabaoth.[i][32]

Role in Gnosticism

A lion-faced, serpentine deity found on a Gnostic gem in Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* may be a depiction of the Demiurge.

Gnosticism originated in the late 1st century CE in non-rabbinical Jewish and early Christian sects.[33] In the formation of Christianity, various sectarian groups, labeled "gnostics" by their opponents, emphasised spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) of the divine spark within, over faith (*pistis*) in the teachings and traditions of the various communities of Christians.[34][35][36][37] Gnosticism presents a distinction between the highest, unknowable God, and the Demiurge, "creator" of the material universe.[34][35][36][38] Gnostics considered the most essential part of the process of salvation to be this personal knowledge, in contrast to faith as an outlook in their worldview along with faith in the ecclesiastical authority.[34][35][36][38]

In Gnosticism, the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden was praised and thanked for bringing knowledge (*gnosis*) to Adam and Eve and thereby freeing them from the malevolent Demiurge's control.[38] Gnostic Christian doctrines rely on a dualistic cosmology that implies the eternal conflict between good and evil, and a conception of the serpent as the liberating savior and bestower of knowledge to humankind opposed to the Demiurge or creator god, identified with the Yahweh from the Hebrew Bible.[38][35] Some Gnostic Christians (such as Marcionites) considered the Hebrew God of the Old Testament as the evil, false god and creator of the material universe, and the Unknown God of the Gospel, the father of Jesus Christ and creator of the spiritual world, as the true, good God.[38][35] In the Archontic, Sethian, and Ophite systems, Yaldabaoth is regarded as the malevolent Demiurge and false god of the Old Testament who generated the material universe and keeps the souls trapped in physical bodies, imprisoned in the world full of pain and suffering that he created.[2][3][4]

However, not all Gnostic movements regarded the creator of the material universe as inherently evil or malevolent.[39][40] For instance, Valentinians believed that the Demiurge is merely an ignorant and incompetent creator, trying to fashion the world as well as he can, but lacking the proper power to maintain its goodness.[39][40] They were regarded as heretics by the proto-orthodox Early Church Fathers.[38][35][41]

Yaldabaoth is primarily mentioned in the Archontic, Sethian, and Ophite writings of Gnostic literature,[4] most of which have been discovered in the Nag Hammadi library.[2][3] In the Apocryphon of John, "Yaldabaoth" is the first of three names of the domineering archon, along with Saklas and Samael. In *Pistis Sophia* he has lost his claim to rulership and, in the depths of Chaos, together with 49 demons, tortures sacrilegious souls in a scorching hot torrent of pitch. Here he is a lion-faced archon, half flame, half darkness. Yaldabaoth appears as a rebellious angel both in the apocryphal Gospel of Judas and the Gnostic work *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In some of these Gnostic texts, Yaldabaoth is further identified with the Ancient Roman god Saturnus.[4]

Cosmogony and creation myths

Yaldabaoth is the son of Sophia, the personification of wisdom in Gnosticism, with whom he contends. By creatively turning to matter in goodness and simplicity, Sophia created the imperfect Yaldabaoth, who has no knowledge of the other aeons. From his mother he received the powers of light, but he used them for evil. Sophia rules over the Ogdoas, the Demiurge over the Hebdomas. Yaldabaoth created six more archons and other fellows.[42] The angels he created rebelled against Yaldabaoth. To keep the angels in subjection, Yaldabaoth generated the material universe.

In the act of creation, however, Yaldabaoth emptied himself of his supreme power. When Yaldabaoth breathed the soul into the first man, Adam, Sophia instilled in him the divine spark of the spirit. After matter, Yaldabaoth produced the serpent spirit (Ophiomorphos), which is the origin of all evil. The light being Sophia caused the fall of man through the serpent. By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve became enlightened and turned away from Yaldabaoth. Eventually, Yaldabaoth expelled them from the ethereal region, the Paradise, as punishment.

Yaldabaoth continuously attempted to deprive human beings of the gift of the spark of light which he had unwittingly lost to them, or to keep them in bondage. As punishments, he tried to make humanity acknowledge him as God.[3] Because of their lack of worship, he caused the Flood upon the human race, from which a feminine power such as Sophia or Pronoia[43] (Providence) rescued Noah.[3] Yaldabaoth made a covenant with Abraham, in which he was obligated to serve him along with his descendants. The Biblical prophets were to proclaim Yaldabaoth's glory, but at the same time, through Sophia's influence, they reminded people of their higher origin and prepared for the coming of Christ. At Sophia's instigation, Yaldabaoth arranged for the generation of Jesus through the Virgin Mary. For his proclamation, he used John the Baptist. At the moment of the baptism organized by Yaldabaoth, Sophia took on the body of Jesus and through it taught people that their destiny was the Kingdom of Light (the spiritual world), not the Kingdom of Darkness (the material universe). Only after his baptism did Jesus receive divine powers and could perform miracles. But since Jesus destroyed his kingdom instead of promoting it, Yaldabaoth had him crucified. Before his martyrdom, Christ escaped from the bodily shell and returned in the spiritual world.

In popular culture

- In H. P. Lovecraft's short story "The Horror at Red Hook" (1925), Robert Suydam invokes Yaldabaoth (by the name Samaël) among the likes of Sephiroth and Ashmodai.[44]

- Yaldaboath, Saklas and Samael are all mentioned in Tori Amos' Song *Original Sinsuality* from her 2005 album The Beekeeper
- In Anatole France's The Revolt of the Angels, the fallen Angel, Arcade, refers to the god of Christians and Jews as Ialdaboath. This is the demiurge that Arcade and many other angels in the story wish to fight, so they can claim dominion in Heaven.
- In the video game *Xenoblade Chronicles* (2010), Yaldabaoth is the name given to the "Faced Mechon" piloted by the game's secondary antagonist, Egil. Ironically, he opposes the primary antagonist, Zanza, whose motivations draw many parallels with the concept of a demiurge.
- In the SCP Foundation collaborative writing project, Yaldabaoth is a prominent figure in the mythologies of Sarkicism and the various traditions dedicated to worshiping Mekhane, religions that have a variety of origins in different canons, but are described on the Church of the Broken God hub page as having come from Ancient China. In Sarkicism, Yaldabaoth (also known as "Važjuma") is the principal power in the universe with six archons that levied several ordeals against the Sarkic prophet, Ion, who himself ascended to godhood upon overcoming them. It is the Sarkites' goal to surpass and destroy Yaldabaoth, and rejoin Grand Karcist Ion in their holy land, "Adytum" (also known as Adí-üm[45] and Samādhi[46]). In the Broken God religions, Yaldabaoth was a feral flesh god trapped inside the body of a wise mechanical god named Mekhane (also known as the Broken God) after an unclear struggle left them both unable to interfere with humanity and Mekhane becoming broken. The adherents (known as Mekhanites in some canons[47]) of these religious groups, or "churches", believed Mekhane's sacrifice allowed humanity to advance technologically. It is the goal of the Broken God churches to collect and reassemble Mekhane's broken parts, and to oppose the Sarkites due to their association with Yaldabaoth.[48]
- In the video game *Persona 5* (2016), Yaldabaoth is a malevolent god that appears in the form of the Holy Grail: a Treasure of Mementos created from humanity's wish for being controlled. The overarching antagonist of the game, Yaldabaoth leads the conspiracy to give Masayoshi Shido political power and sponsors the Phantom Thieves of Hearts to see which is stronger: their salvation of the world or Goro Akechi's desire to destroy and recreate the world.[49] Yaldabaoth serves as the main antagonist and final boss of Persona 5, and in the expanded rerelease Persona 5 Royal, Yaldabaoth is fought at the same point in the story, but is only the final boss if the player has not unlocked the new third semester.
- In the video game *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (2020), the names Yaldabaoth, Saklas, and Samael are mentioned as individual members of the Isu, an ancient and highly-advanced species. Known as the "Father of Understanding", the "Mother of Wisdom", and the "Sacred Voice" respectively, the

triad were responsible for the early stages of Project Anthropos, which was the creation of humanity.[50][51]

- In Andrew Hussie's multimedia literary work *Homestuck*, a character named Yaldabaoth, in the shape of a snake with a sun-like head, appears. He is a Denizen, a powerful enemy created by the code of SBURB for a player or players to overcome. Caliborn defeated Yaldabaoth to achieve his more powerful Lord English form through vague means.
- Yaldabaoth was referenced as inspiration for the British deathcore band Infant Annihilator's studio album *The Battle of Yaldabaoth* (2019).

See also

- Ancient Canaanite religion
- Ancient Semitic religion
- Atenism
- Bahá'í Faith and the unity of religion
- *Dhimmi*
- Demiurge
- Dystheism
- Ethical monotheism
- Evil God Challenge
- False prophet
- God in Abrahamic religions
  - God in the Bahá'í Faith
  - God in Christianity
  - God in Judaism
  - God in Islam
  - God in Mormonism
  - Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs § God
- God in Zoroastrianism
- Maltheism

- Moralistic therapeutic deism
- Outline of theology
- Prince of Darkness (Manichaeism)
- Problem of evil
- Problem of Hell
- Religion in pre-Islamic Arabia
- Samael
- Satanic Verses
- Theistic Satanism
- Theodicy
- Trickster god
- *Urmonotheismus* (primitive monotheism)
- Violence in the Bible
- Violence in the Quran

Notes

a. Spelling differs based on assumptions of the name deriving from a Semitic language in which the first letter represents a Yodh and should encode a voiced palatal approximant sound (IPA: [j]); German-speaking scholars (such as Scholem and Adam) favoured the spelling of "Jaldabaoth" based on German orthography even when writing in English, while English-speaking authors more commonly use "Yaldabaoth".

b. For example it was repeated in 1831 in a textbook by Gieseler.[11]

c. He was the first Nag Hammadi scholar to comment on the issue

d. Which they claimed to be cognate with Hebrew: בוהו, romanized: *bōhu*.

e. For example Quispel did so by humorously lamenting that due its literary merits he believes the originator of the name Yaldabaoth had made the same erroneous connection between baoth and tohuwabohu as the former majority view.[14]

f. With its final vowel functioning like a liaison

g. One of the names of God in Judaism

h. A Gnostic reception of this account can be found in the Phibionite text *Birth of Mary* in it Zechariah son of Berachiah, father of John the Baptist, enters the Holiest of Holies as a pious priest but to his surprise finds a being in the form of donkey there. He runs out from the temple and wants to shout to crowd whom they had been worshipping, but cannot as the donkey deity froze his tongue. Despite the donkey god's best efforts to keep Zechariah silent he eventually manages to address the crowd, revealing their god to be shaped like a donkey. In response to which they kill him on the steps of the temple.[27]

i. Accordingly, the Phibionites believed Yaldabaoth to have a donkey-like appearance.[30] The Secret Book of John describes Yaldabaoth as a shape-shifting Typhon-like being, looking like a snake with a lion's head, but whose donkey-headed child Eloaios gives witness to his other more donkey-like forms.[31]

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18. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "We see this tradition recounted by several writers. Around 200 BCE, a man called Mnaseas (an Alexandrian originally from what is now southern Turkey), told a story of an Idumean (southern Palestinian) who entered the Judean temple and tore off the golden head of a pack ass from the inner sanctuary. This head was evidently attached to a body, whether human or donkey. The reader would have understood that the Jews (secretly) worshiped Yahweh as a donkey in the Jerusalem temple, since gold was characteristically used for cult statues of gods. Egyptians knew only one other deity in ass-like form: Seth."

19. te Velde, Herman (1977). Helck, Wolfgang (ed.). *Seth, God of Confusion* (https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004676688) . Probleme der Ägyptologie. Vol. VI. Translated by van Baaren-Pape, Gertrude Echtgenote. Leiden: Brill. pp. 14–15. doi:10.1163/9789004676688 (https://doi.org/10.1163%2F9789004676688) . ISBN 90-04-05402-2. "Since the above was written, there has appeared an important article by B. H. Stricker, *Asinarii I, OMRO NR* 46 (1965), p. 52-75. In Stricker's opinion there can be no reasonable doubt that the Seth-animal represents an ass. Apart from the late data of the Graeco-Roman period, his arguments are the unusual script of the word ꜥꜣ (ass) with the Seth-animal as determinative, already mentioned above, and Daressy's description of the šꜣ-animal on the sarcophagus of Nesamon as having an ass's head: G. Daressy, *L'animal séthien à tête d'âne, ASAE* 20 (1920), p. 165-166. These arguments only prove, it seems to me, that the ass was one of the Typhonic animals, as the pig was for instance. From the fact that the šꜣ-animal may have a pig as determinative, while šꜣ is indeed a common word for pig, I conclude that the pig, like the ass, is a Typhonic animal. On the socle Behague the Seth-animal or šꜣ-animal has a jackal as determinative (A. Klasens, *A magical statue base (socle Behague) in the Museum of Antiquities at Leiden*, Leiden, 1952, (= *OMRO NR* 33), p. 41, h 14). The Seth-animal does not seem to be exclusively an ass, but a mythical animal that if necessary or desired can be connected with various zoologically definable animals. In Graeco-Roman times there is a reluctance, connected with the ending of the official cult of Seth, to depict this mythological animal itself. The earlier multiplicity of approach with zoologically definable animals is also restricted, and the Seth-animal is unilaterally replaced by the ass. Yet the author of the *Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden* XIX, 27 still knows "the griffin in whose hand is Osiris" (F. L. Griffiths and H. Thompson, *The demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden*, I, London 1904, p. 127). The tradition, therefore, that the Seth-animal was not merely an ass but a mythical animal, was carried on until the end."

20. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "Important for our purposes, Seth was frequently described as having the form or skin of a donkey. From ancient times, he appeared in Egyptian art as a human figure with the head (or mask) of a creature showing long, cropped ears and a drooping snout. The Greeks, at least, identified this creature with a donkey, and the donkey was portrayed—along with the pig—as Seth's sacred animal"
21. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "Since the fifth century BCE (and probably earlier), there was a Greek cultural practice of identifying foreign gods now dubbed *interpretatio Graeca*. In short, Greeks would identify two different gods from two different cultures based on shared traits. For instance, the Egyptian god Thoth was identified with the Greek Hermes because both were considered clever. [...] When it came to Seth, the Greeks had long identified him with Typhon, lord of chaos. Typhon was more of a monster than a god. [...] Another Greek poet described him as "enemy of gods.[...] Hellenized Egyptians capitalized on this cultural practice of translation by viewing the Jewish god Yahweh as a form of Seth."
22. Ross, William A. (15 November 2021). "The Most Important Bible Translation You've Never Heard Of" (https://textandcanon.org/the-most-important-bible-translation-youve-never-heard-of/) . *Articles*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Text & Canon Institute of the Phoenix Seminary. Retrieved 25 December 2022.

23. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "The case of Ezekiel is important because he adapted the story for the stage. Theater was enjoyed, not just by Jews, but by Egyptians, Greeks, and by the many peoples of mixed cultural heritage in Egypt. If Ezekiel's play was staged (as its form indicates), it was probably presented to a wide audience.[...] Egyptian priests, including famous historians like Manetho and Chaeremon, would have been horrified by the Exodus myth's rhetorical violence wielded against Egypt, its people, and its gods. The Egyptian gods were depicted as powerless to defend themselves against the relentless attacks of a foreign deity, a being who showed open favoritism to his own people while unleashing the equivalent of biological warfare against the Egyptian populace. Beginning in the first century BCE, Hellenized Egyptian literati punched back to refute and reverse elements of the Exodus story using the resources of their own millennia-long cultural memory. In their retellings, the Egyptians were not plagued; it was the Hebrews who were afflicted with leprosy and boils. Instead of the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, it was the Hebrews drowned in lakes on leaden rafts. Instead of the Hebrews bursting out of Egypt weighted with gold, they were disgorged into the desert—the realm of Seth—and left there to wander with nothing. The flight of a liberated people was retooled as an expulsion of a diseased and doomed tribe."

24. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "From the Greco-Egyptian perspective, Yahweh and Seth shared several traits: they were both gods of foreigners, of the desert, and of frightening storms. They both sent calamities. Indeed, Egyptians could not help but notice that some of the plagues unleashed by Yahweh resembled disasters customarily inflicted by Seth: darkness, eclipse, and pestilence. Red was the distinctive hue of Seth, and Yahweh turned the Nile crimson before ordering the Hebrews to paint their lintels with blood. Mount Sinai, the desert crag from which Yahweh revealed his Law, quaked as it was enveloped in thunder, lightning, and fire—all phenomena associated with Seth. Finally, the Greek word for Yahweh (Iaō)—with a perverse twist of the tongue—sounded like the native Egyptian word for donkey (eiō or simply iō). These factors, even if judged artificial today, were more than enough for Hellenized Egyptians to portray Yahweh as a form of Seth."

25. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "For centuries, Jews had scorned the religion of Egypt as the worship of dumb beasts. One way for learned Egyptians to fight back was to depict the Jewish deity as himself the most vile and ridiculous beast. If Yahweh was a form of Seth, then he could be portrayed in Seth's ass-like shape. Thus there arose the tradition that the Jews (secretly) worshiped Yahweh as a donkey or as a man standing upright with an ass's head."
26. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "Over a hundred years later, two respected scholars [...] passed on a tradition that the Jews venerated their deity in the form of a golden donkey head. According to their versions (whose differences we cannot precisely discern), it was the Macedonian king—archenemy of the Jews—Antiochus IV Epiphanes who discovered the donkey head when he ransacked the Jewish temple around 167 BCE. [...] Variants of this story fusing the form of Seth and Yahweh spread like a cancer. [...] Tacitus, who wrote (early in the second century CE) that the Jews dedicated in their holiest shrine a statue of a wild ass. We gather that the tradition of the Jews (secretly) worshiping their god in donkey form was widely known by the early second century CE. Whoever originally invented the tales of the statue(s) was probably a person of Egyptian cultural heritage attempting to depict Yahweh as a form of Seth. But the image had gone viral and could be learned in Syria, Rhodes, Greece, Egypt, Rome—and evidently the places in between."

27. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "As in Luke, Zechariah entered the temple, beheld a vision, and was made dumb. As he was releasing a cloud of incense from his censor, he beheld, to his surprise, a person standing in the Holy of Holies. This mysterious being lurking in the smoke was no Gabriel, however, but a being with the face or form of a donkey (onou morphēn). This was the creature who silently—and secretly—received the devoted worship of the Jewish people. The stunned Zechariah stormed out of the temple intending to shout to the bystanders: "Woe to you! Whom are you worshiping?!" He would have done so, had not the ass deity—much like Gabriel—stopped up his mouth. But the powers of the donkey god were evidently frail, because Zechariah managed to soften his stony tongue and relate to the Jews the horror he beheld inside. The people were aghast—not (or not only) to learn of the perverse shape of their deity—but that Zechariah the high priest would say things so disturbing as to strike at the root of their religious worship. And so—as if Zechariah himself were some sacrificial bull or goat—they cut him down then and there at the foot of the temple altar"

28. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "an unknown graffiti artist carved into the plaster of a palace chamber in Rome a donkey-headed deity dangling from a cross (see Figure 1.3). At the foot of the cross stands a stumpy, loutish figure with hand raised in adoration. The caption, written in Greek, reads: "Alexamenos worships god." Alexamenos—a slavish buffoon given his posture and dress—is evidently a Christian worshiping the crucified Christ. It just so happens that Christ has the head of an ass. [...] It is possible that a Roman slave or schoolboy who worked in the palace was familiar with a being like Onocoetes, a Christian amulet, or the donkey worship mentioned by Minucius. It is also possible, however, that whoever scratched the crucified donkey into the plaster was familiar with alternative Christian traditions that portrayed the creator or one of his minions as a donkey-headed demon. He would then be invoking the idea of "like father, like son": donkey-headed father god gives birth to donkey-headed son (Jesus)."

29. Viladesau, Richard (1992). *The Word in and Out of Season* (https://books.google.com/books?id=3FRi1eU4BYEC&q=alexamenos&pg=PA46) . Paulist Press. p. 46. ISBN 978-0-8091-3626-1.

30. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "Sabaoth, sometimes identified with Yaldabaoth, was identical to the Judean creator. After the souls of the redeemed depart from this world, they make their way past every ruler. The last and most difficult ruler to evade is the creator, who cannot be passed apart from the attainment of full knowledge (gnosis). These Christians believed that Sabaoth had either the shape of a donkey or of a pig."

31. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "One copy of the shorter version of the Secret Book reports that the chief creator Yaldabaoth "had the face of a snake and the face of a lion." In the longer version, he is described as "a lion-faced serpent."91 These traits were reminiscent of Seth-Typhon's snake heads and lionlike roar—not to mention his eyes, "flashing like fires of lightning.[...] When it comes to donkey features, however, one must attend to Yaldabaoth's offspring. These include the seven planetary rulers. The second of these, called Eloaios, had the face of a donkey. In one manuscript, Eloaios's donkey face is explicitly called "the face of Typhon." The notion of "like father, like son" seems to be implied. Eloaios activated the typhonic potential embedded in the chief creator, Yaldabaoth. "Evidence for this view is Yaldabaoth's shape-shifting character. As a being expressing chaos, he had a "crowd of faces"—innumerable appearances that he could manifest at will. Whenever he desired, apparently, Yaldabaoth could manifest donkey features. Eloaios was the child of the creator, and his donkey visage realized one of Yaldabaoth's many forms." "

32. Litwa, M. David (2021). "The Donkey Deity". *The Evil Creator: Origins of an Early Christian Idea* (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-756643-5. OCLC 1243261365 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1243261365) . "Seth-Yahweh was a donkey-shaped god of evil established in pre-Christian cultural memory and adapted by alternative Christian groups to express a hostility toward the Judean creator that had been voiced for centuries. This means that so-called Phibionite, Sethian, and Ophite Christians did not have to invent Yahweh as an evil character out of whole cloth. The wicked creator was already available, and his symbolic value was cashed out in new mythmaking practices that could be aimed not (or not only) at Jews but also at other Christian opponents who had adopted the Jewish creator as their chief deity."

33. Magris, Aldo (2005). "Gnosticism: Gnosticism from its origins to the Middle Ages (further considerations)". In Jones, Lindsay (ed.). *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan Inc. pp. 3515–3516. ISBN 978-0028657332. OCLC 56057973 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/56057973) .

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39. Bousset, Wilhelm (1911). "Valentinus and the Valentinians" (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Valentinus_and_the_Valentinians) . *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 27 (11th ed.). pp. 852–857.

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Further reading

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- Karen L. King: *The Secret Revelation of John*. Harvard University Press, 2006, ISBN 0-674-01903-2, pp. 89–105.
- Attilio Mastrocinque: *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 24). Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005, ISBN 3-16-148555-6.

External links

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